



TANCRED and SIGISMUNDA.

Act 4.

Garden Scene.

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INCRED and SIGISMUND

A
T R A G E D Y.

WRITTEN BY

JAMES THOMSON, Esq.

AS IT IS PERFORMED AT THE

THEATRES ROYAL



L O N D O N :

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M.DCC.LXXVII.

PROLOGUE.

BOLD is the man! who, in this nicer age,
Presumes to tread the chaste corrected stage,
Now, with gay tinsel arts, we can no more
Conceal the want of nature's sterling ore.
Our spells are vanish'd, broke our magic wand,
That us'd to waft us over sea and land.
Before your light the fairy people fade,
The demons fly—the ghost itself is laid.
In vain of martial scenes the loud alarms,
The mighty prompter thundering out to arms,
The playhouse posies slattering from afar,
The close-wedg'd battle, and the din of war.
Now, e'en the senate seldom we convene;
The yawning fathers nod behind the scene.
Your taste rejects the glittering false sublime,
To sigh in metaphor, and die in rhyme.
High rant is tumbled from his gallery throne:
Description, dreams—nay, fables are gone.

What shall we then? to please you how devise,
Whose judgment sits not in your ears and eyes?
Thrice happy! could we catch great Shakspeare's
To trace the deep recesses of the heart: [art,
His simple, plain sublime, to which is given
To strike the soul with darted flame from heaven:
Could we awake soft Otway's tender woe,
The pomp of verse and golden lines of Rowe.

We to your hearts apply: let them attend;
Before their silent candid bar we bend.
If warm'd, they listen, 'tis our noblest praise:
If cold, they wither all the muse's bays.

EPILOGUE.

CRAMM'D to the throat with wholesome mo-
ral stuff,
Alas, poor audience! you have had enough.
Whichever hapless heroine of a play
Is such a piteous plight as ours to-day?
What ever woman so by love betray'd?
Mistaken with one husband, and yet—die a maid.
But hush me!—hold—what sounds are these I
Hear?
The Tragic Muse herself appears.

*The back-scene opens, and discovers a romantic Syl-
van landscape; from which the Tragic Muse ad-
vances slowly to music, and speaks the following
lines:*

Hence with your slipshod epilogue, that tries
To wipe the virtuous tear from British eyes;
That dares my moral, tragic scene profane,
With strains—at best, unsuited, light and vain.
Hence from the pure unfulfill'd beams that play
In yon fair eyes where virtue shines—Away!

Britons, to you from chaste Castalian groves,
Where dwell the tender, oft unhappy loves;
Where shades of heroes roam, each mighty name,
And court my aid to rise again to fame;
To you I come, to freedom's noblest seat,
And in Britannia fix my last retreat.

In Greece and Rome, I watch'd the public
weal;

The purple tyrant trembled at my steel:
Nor did I less o'er private sorrows reign,
And mend the melting heart with softer pain.
On France and You then rose my brightning star,
With social ray—The arts are ne'er at war.
Oh, as your fire and genius stronger blaze,
As yours are generous freedom's bolder lay,
Let not the Gallic taste leave yours behind;
In decent manners and in life refin'd;
Banish the motly mode, to tag low verse,
The laughing ballad to the mournful herse
When thro' five acts your hearts have lean'd to
glow,

Touch'd with the sacred force of honest we,
Oh, keep the dear impression on your brow,
Nor idly lose it for a wretched jest.

DRAMATIS PERSONE.

Tancred,
Siffredi,
Osmond,
Rodolpho,
Officers,
Sigismunda,
Laura,
Guards and other Attendants.
SCENE Palermo &c.

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

ACT I. SCENE the Palace.

Enter Sigismunda and Laura.

Sig. *A* H, fatal day to Sicily! The king
Approaches his last moments!

Lau. So 'tis fear'd.

[charged]

Sig. Laura, 'tis told, the heart is sometimes
With a prophetic sadness; such, methinks,
Now hangs on mine. The king's approaching
death

Suggests a thousand fears. What troubles thence
May throw the state once more into confusion,
What sudden changes in my father's house
May rise, and part me from my dearest Tancred,
Alarms my thoughts.

Lau. The fears of love-sick fancy!
Perversely busy to torment itself.
But be assur'd, your father's steady friendship,
Join'd to a certain genius that commands,
Not kneels to fortune, will support and cherish,
Here in the public eye of Sicily,
This, I may call him, his adopted son,
The noble Tancred, form'd to all his virtues.

Sig. Ah, form'd to charm his daughter!—This
fair morn
Has tempted far the chace. Is he not yet
Return'd?

Lau. No—When your father to the king
(Who now expiring lies) was call'd in haste,
He sent each way his messengers to find him;
With such a look of ardour and impatience,
As if this near event was to count Tancred
Of more importance than I comprehend. *[birth,*

Sig. There lies, my Laura, o'er my Tancred's
A cloud I cannot pierce, With princely actost,

Nay, with respect, which oft I have observ'd
Stealing at times submissive o'er his features.
In Belmont's woods my father saw'd this youth—
Ah, woods! where first my ancles before learn'd
The sighs of love—He gives him out the son
Of an old friend, a baron of Apulia,
Who in the late troubles bravely fell—
But then 'tis stranger to all his family,
As well as father, dead! and all their friends,
Except my sire, the generous and virtuous
Had he a mother, sister, brother left, would he
The last remain of kindred; with what pride,
What rapture, might they fly o'er such a sea,
To claim this rising honour of their blood!
This bright unknown! this all-accomplish'd
youth!

Who charms, too much, the heart of Sigismunda!
What says Rodolpho? Does he truly credit
This story of his birth?

Lau. He has sometimes,
Like you, his doubts; yet, when maturely weigh'd,
Believer it true. As for lord Tancred's fall,
He never entertain'd the slightest thought
That very'd to doubt; but oft laments his fate,
By cruel fortune so ill-pear'd to yours.

Sig. Merit like his, the fortune of the mind,
Beggars all wealth—Then, to your brother, Laura,
He talks of me?

Lau. Of nothing else. How'er
The talk begin, it ends with Sigismunda.
Their morning, noontide, and their evening walks
Are full of you; and all the woods of Belmont
Enamour'd with your name.

Sig. Away, my friend;
You flatter—yet the dear delusion charms.

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

Law. No, Sigismunda, 'tis the strictest truth,
Not half the truth, I tell you. Even with fond-
My brother talks for ever of the passion, [ness
That firm young Tancred's breast. So much it
strikes him,

He praises love as if he were a lover.

——— Heaven, he says,

In lavish bounty form'd the heart for love;

In love included all the finer seeds

Of honour, virtue, friendship, purest bliss——

Sig. Virtuous Rodolpho!

Law. Then his pleasing theme

He varies to the praises of your lover——

Sig. And what, my Laura, says he on the sub-
ject?

Law. He says, that tho' he were not nobly born
Nature has form'd him noble, generous, brave.

——— Chiefly one charm

He in his graceful character observes;

That tho' his passions burn with high impatience,

And sometimes, from a noble heat of nature,

Are ready to fly off; yet the least check

Of ruling reason brings them back to temper,

And gentle submiss.

Sig. True! Oh, true Rodolpho!

Bless'd be the kindred worth for loving his!

He is all warmth, all amiable fire,

All quick heroic ardour! temper'd soft

With gentleness of heart, and manly reason!

If virtue were to wear a human form,

To light it with her dignity and flame,

Then soft'ning mix her smiles and tender graces;

Oh, she would choose the person of my Tancred!

Go on, my friend, go on, and ever praise him;

The subject knows no bounds, nor can I tire,

While my breast trembles to that sweetest music!

The heart of woman knows no truer joy,

Is never flatter'd with such dear enchantment——

——— as when

She hears the praises of the man she loves——

Law. Madam, your father comes.

Enter Siffredi, speaking to an attendant as he enters.

Sif. Lord Tancred is found?

Att. My lord, he quickly will be here.

Sif. 'Tis well—retire—You too, my daughter,

leave me.

Sig. I go, my father—But how fares the king?

Sif. He is no more. Gone to that awful state,

Where kings the crown wear only of their virtues.

Sig. How bright must then be his!—This stroke

is sudden;

He was this morning well, when to the chase

Lord Tancred went.

Sif. 'Tis true. But at his years

Death gives short notice—Drooping nature then,

Without a gust of pain to shake it, falls.

His death, my daughter, was that happy period

Which few attain. The duties of his day

Were all discharg'd,

——— Calm as evening skies

Was his pure mind, and lighted up with hopes

That open heaven; when, for his last long sleep

Timely prepar'd, a lassitude of life,

A pleasing weariness of mortal joy,

Fell on his soul, and down he sunk to rest.

Oh, may my death be such!—He but one wish

Left unfulfill'd, which was to see count Tancred——

Sig. To see count Tancred!—Pardon me, my

lord——

[emotion,

Sif. For what, my daughter!—But, with such

Why did you start at mention of count Tancred?

Sig. Nothing—I only hop'd the dying king

Might mean to make some generous, just provision

For this your worthy charge, this noble orphan.

Sif. And he has done it largely—Leave me

now——

I want some private conference with lord Tancred.

[*Exeunt Sigismunda and Laura.*

My doubts are but too true—If these old eyes

Can trace the marks of love, a mutual passion

Has seiz'd, I fear, my daughter and this prince,

My sovereign now—Should it be so?—Ah, there,

There lurks a brooding tempest, that may shake

My long-concerted scheme, to settle firm

The public peace and welfare, which the king

Has made the prudent basis of his will——

Away, unworthy views! you shall not tempt me!

Nor interest, nor ambition shall seduce

My fix'd resolve—Perish the selfish thought,

Which our own good prefers to that of millions!

He comes, my king! unconscious of his fortune.

Enter

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

Enter Tancred.

Tan. My lord Siffredi, in your looks I read,
Confirm'd, the mournful news that fly abroad
From tongue to tongue—We then, at last, have lost
The good old king?

Siff. Yes, we have lost a father?

The greatest blessing heaven bestows on mortals,
A good, a worthy king—Hear me, my Tancred,
And I will tell thee, in a few plain words,
How he deserv'd that best, that glorious title.
He lov'd his people, deem'd them all his children;
The good exalted, and depress'd the bad.
He sought alone the good of those for whom
He was entrusted with the sovereign power—
Well knowing that a people in their rights
And industry protected, living safe
Beneath the sacred shelter of the laws,
Are ne'er ungrateful. With unsparing hand
They will for him provide—their filial love
And confidence are his unfailing treasure,
And every honest man his faithful guard.

Tan. A general face of grief o'erspreads the city.
I mark the people, as I hither came,
In crowds assembled, struck with silent sorrow,
And pouring forth the noblest praise of tears.

—A mingled murmur ran
Along the streets; and, from the lonely court
Of him who can no more assist their fortunes,
I saw the courtier-fry, with eager haste,
All hurrying to Constantia.

Siff. Noble youth!

I joy to hear from thee these just reflections,
Worthy of riper years—But if they seek
Constantia, trust me, they mistake their course.

Tan. How—Is she not, my lord, the late king's
Heir to the crown of Sicily? the last [sister,
Of our fam'd Norman line, and now our queen?

Siff. Tancred, 'tis true; she is the late king's
The sole surviving offspring of that tyrant [sister,
William the Bad—born some months
After the tyrant's death, but not next heir.

Tan. You much surprise me—May I then pre-
To ask who is? [sume

Siff. Come nearer, noble Tancred,
Son of my care, I must, on this occasion,

Consult thy generous heart; which when con-
By rectitude of mind and honest virtues, [desist
Gives better counsel than the hoary head—
Then know, there lives a prince, here in Palermo,
The lineal offspring of our famous hero,
Roger the First.

Tan. Great heav'n!—How far remov'd
From that our mighty founder?

Siff. His great grandfod:
Sprung from his eldest son, who died untimely,
Before his father.

Tan. Ha! the prince you mean,
Is he not Manfred's son? The generous, brave,
Unhappy Manfred? whom the tyrant William,
You just now mention'd, not content to spoil
Of his paternal crown, threw into fetters,
And infamously murder'd?

Siff. Yes, the same.

Tan. ———But this prince,
Where has he lain conceal'd?

Siff. The late good king,
By noble pity mov'd, contriv'd to save him
From his dire father's unrelenting rage,
And had him rear'd in private, as became [stare;
His birth and hopes, with high and princely note
Till now, too young to rule a troubled state,
By civil broils most miserably torn,
He in his safe retreat has lain conceal'd,
His birth and fortune to himself unknown;
But when the dying king to me entrusted,
As to the chancellor of the realm, his will,
His successor he nam'd him.

Tan. Happy youth!
He then will triumph o'er his father's foe,
O'er haughty Osmond, and the tyrant's daughter.

Siff. Ay, that is what I dread—that heat of
youth;

There lurks, I fear, perdition to the state.
I dread the horrors of rekindled war;
Tho' dead, the tyrant still is to be fear'd;
His daughter's party still is strong and numerous;
Her friend, earl Osmond, constable of Sicily,
Experienc'd, brave, high-born, of mighty in-
terest.

Better the prince and princess should by marriage

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

Unite their friends, their interest, and their claims;

Then will the peace and welfare of the land
On a firm basis rise.

Tan. My Lord Siffredi,
If by myself I of this prince may judge,
That scheme will scarce succeed—Your prudent
In vain will counsel, if the heart forbid it— [age
But wherefore fear? The right is clearly his.
All Sicily will rouse, all faithful hearts
Will range themselves around prince Manfred's
For me, I here devote me to the service [son.
Of this young prince; I every drop of blood
Will lose with joy, with transport in his cause—
Then, find the prince;

Lose not a moment to awaken in him
The royal soul. Perhaps, he now desponding,
Pines in a corner, and laments his fortune;
That in the narrower bounds of private life
He must confine his aims, those swelling virtues
Which from his noble father he inherits.

Sif. Perhaps, regardless, in the common bane
Of youth he melts, in vanity and love.
But if the seeds of virtue glow within him,
I will awake a higher sense, a love
That grasps the love and happiness of millions.

Tan. Why that surmise? Or should he love,
Siffredi,

I doubt not, it is nobly, which will raise
And animate his virtues—Oh, permit me
To plead the cause of youth—Their virtue oft,
In pleasure's soft enchantment lull'd a while,
Forgets itself; it sleeps and gaily dreams,
Till great occasion rouse it; then all flame,
It walks abroad, with heighten'd soul and vigour,
And by the change astonishes the world.

Sif. Hear him, immortal shades of his great
fathers!—

Forgive me, Sir, this trial of your heart.
Thou! thou, art he!

Tan. Siffredi!

Sif. Tancred, thou!
Thou art the man, of all the many thousands
That toil upon the bosom of this isle
By heaven elected to command the rest,
To rule, protect them, and to make them happy!

Tan. Manfred my father! I the last support
Of the fam'd Norman line, that awes the world!
I, who this morning wander'd forth an orphan,
Outcast of all but thee, my second father!
Thus call'd to glory! to the first great lot
Of human kind—Oh, wonder-working hand,
That in majestic silence sways at will
The mighty movements of unbounded nature;
Oh, grant me, heaven, the virtues to sustain
This awful burden of so many heroes!
Let me not be exalted into shame,
Set up the worthless pageant of vain grandeur.
Mean time I thank the justice of the king,
Who has my right bequeath'd me. Thee, Sif-
fredi,

I thank thee—Oh, I ne'er enough can thank thee!
Yes, thou hast been—thou art—shalt be my fa-
ther!

Thou shalt direct my unexperienc'd years,
Shalt be the ruling head, and I the hand.

Sif. It is enough for me—to see my sovereign
Assert his virtues, and maintain his honour.

Tan. I think, my Lord, you said the king com-
mitted

To you his will. I hope it is not clogg'd
With any base conditions, any clause,
To tyrannize my heart, and to Constantia
Enslave my hand, devoted to another.
The hint you just now gave of that alliance,
You must imagine, wakes my fear. But know,
In this alone I will not bear dispute,
Not even from thee, Siffredi!—Let the council
Be straight assembled, and the will there ordain'd—
Thence issue speedy orders to convene,
This day ere noon, the senate; where those barons,
Who now are in Palermo, will attend,
To pay their ready homage to their king.

Sif. I go, my liege. But once again permit me
To tell you—Now, now, is the trying crisis,
That must determine of your future reign.
Oh, with heroic rigour watch your heart!
And to the sovereign duties of the king,
Th' unequal'd pleasures of a god on earth,
Submit the common joys, the common passions,
Nay even the virtues of the private man.

Tan. Of that no more, they not oppose, but aid,
Invigorate,

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

Invigorate, cherish, and reward each other.

[Exit Siff.]

Now, generous Sigismunda, comes my turn
To shew my love was not of thine unworthy,
When fortune bade me blush to look to thee.
But what is fortune to the wish of love?

A miserable bankrupt!

Quick, let me find her! taste that highest joy,
Th' exalted heart can know, the mix'd effusion
Of gratitude and love!—Behold, she comes!

Enter Sigismunda.

My fluttering soul was on the wing to find thee,
My love, my Sigismunda!

Sig. Oh, my Tancred!

Tell me, what means this mystery and gloom
That lours around? Just now, involv'd in thought,
My father shot athwart me—You, my lord,
Seem strangely mov'd—I fear some dark event,
From the king's death, to trouble our repose,
That tender calm we in the woods of Belmont
So happily enjoy'd—Explain this hurry—
What means it? Say.

Tan. It means that we are happy!
Beyond our most romantic wishes happy!

Sig. You but perplex me more.

Tan. It means, my fairest,
That thou art queen of Sicily; and I
The happiest of mankind!
Because with thee I can adorn my throne,
Manfred, who fell by tyrant William's rage,
Fam'd Roger's lineal issue, was my father.—

[Pausing.]

You droop, my love—dejected on a sudden;
You seem to mourn my fortune—The soft tear
Springs in thy eye—Oh, let me kiss it off—
Why this, my Sigismunda?

Sig. Royal Tancred,
None at your glorious fortune can like me
Rejoice—yet me alone of all Sicilians,
It makes unhappy.

Tan. I should hate it then! [me!—]
Should throw, with scorn, the splendid ruin from
No, Sigismunda, 'tis my hope with thee
To share it, whence it draws its richest value.

Sig. You are my sovereign—I at humble dis-
tance—

Tan. Thou art my queen? the sovereign of my
soul!

The dear, the tender, generous Sigismunda!

Sig. Your heart, I know, disdains the little
thought

Of changing with the vain, external change
Of circumstance and fortune.

But, ah! the hearts of kings are not their own.
Some high-descended princess, who will bring
New power and interest to your throne, demands
Your royal hand—perhaps Constantia—

Tan. She!

Oh, name her not! Were I this moment free,
And disengag'd as he who never sigh'd
For matchless worth like thine, I should abhor
All thoughts of that alliance. Her fell father
Most basely murder'd mine;
And canst thou deem me, then so poorly tame,
So cool a traitor to my father's blood,
As from the prudent cowardice of state
E'er to submit to such a base proposal?
They whom just heaven has to a throne exalted,
To guard the rights and liberties of others,
What duty binds them to betray their own?
Or if indeed, my choice must be directed
By views of public good, whom shall I chuse
So fit to grace, to dignify a crown,
And beam sweet mercy on a happy people,
As thee, my love? Whom place upon my throne
But thee, descended from the good Siffredi?

Sig. Cease, cease to raise my hopes above my duty,
Charm me no more, my Tancred—Oh, that we
In those blest woods, where first you won my soul,
Had pass'd our gentle days; far from the toil
And pomp of courts! Such is the wish of love,
You cannot hush a voice

That murmurs here—I must not be persuaded!

Tan. [Kneeling.] Hear me, thou soul of all my
hopes and wishes!

And witness Heaven, prime source of love and joy!
Not a whole warring world combin'd against me,
Shall ever shake my faith to Sigismunda!

[Trumpets and exclamations heard.]

But, hark! the public voice to duties calls me,
Which with unwearied zeal I will discharge;
And thou—yes, thou shalt be my bright reward—

Yet

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

Yet—ere I go—to hush thy lovely fears,
Thy delicate objections—[*Writes his name*—Take
this blank,
Sign'd with my name, and give it to thy father—
Tell him, 'tis my command, it be fill'd up
With a most strict and solemn marriage-contract.
How dear each tie! how charming to my soul!
That more unites me to my Sigismunda.
For her, and for my people's good to live,
Is all the bliss which sovereign power can give.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT II.

SCENE, a grand Salon.

Enter Siffredi.

SO far 'tis well—The late king's will proceeds
Upon the plan I counsel'd;—that prince
Tancred

Shall make Constantia partner of his throne.

Oh, great, oh, wish'd event!

But how this mighty obstacle surmount,
Which love has thrown betwixt?—My daughter
owns

Her passion for the king; she trembling own'd it,
With prayers and tears, and tender supplications,
That almost shook my firmness—And this blank,
Which his rash fondness gave her, shews how much,
To what a wild extravagance he loves—

I see no means—it foils my deepest thought—

How to control this madness of the king,

That wears the face of virtue, and will thence

Disdain restraint. The crowding barons

Here summon'd to the palace, meet already,

To pay their homage, and confirm the will.

On a few moments hang the public fate,

On a few hasty moments—Ha! there shone

A gleam of hope—Yes, with this very paper

I yet will save him—Here is the royal hand—

I will beneath it write a perfect, full,

And absolute agreement to the will;

Which read before the nobles of the realm

Assembled, in the sacred face of Sicily,

Constantia present, every heart and eye

Fix'd on the monarch, every tongue applauding,

He must submit, his dream of love must vanish—

It shall be done—To me, I know, 'tis ruin;

But safety to the public, to the king.

I will not reason more.—No—'tis fix'd!

I here devote me for my prince and country;

Let them be safe, and let me nobly perish!

Behold, Earl Osmond comes, without whose aid

My schemes are all in vain.

Enter Osmond.

Os. My lord Siffredi,
I from the council hasten'd to Constantia,
And have accomplish'd what we there propos'd.
The princess to the will submits her claims.
She with her presence means to grace the senate,
And of your royal charge, young Tancred's hand,
Accept.—Methought, besides,
I could discern, that not from prudence merely
She to this choice submitted.

Siff. Noble Osmond,
You have in this done to the public great
And signal service. Yes, I must avow it;
This frank and ready instance of your zeal,
In such a trying crisis of the state,
Upbraids the rashness of my former judgement.

Os. Siffredi, no. To you belongs the praise;
'Tis you, my Lord, to whom the many thousands,
That by the barbarous sword of civil war
Had fallen inglorious, owe their lives—
I blush to think

I have so long oppos'd the best good man
In Sicily—

To yours I join my hand; with you will own

No interest and no party but my country.

Nor is your friendship only my ambition:

There is a dearer name, and the name of father,

By which I should rejoice to call Siffredi.

Your daughter's hand would to the public weal

Unite my private happiness.

Siff. My lord,
You have my glad consent. To be allied
To your distinguish'd family and merit,
I shall esteem an honour. From my soul
I here embrace Earl Osmond as my friend
And son.

Os. You make him happy.

I from

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

I from this moment vow myself the friend
And zealous servant of Siffredi's house.

Enter an Officer belonging to the court.

Off. [To Siffredi.] The king, my lord, demands
your speedy presence.

Siff. I will attend him straight—Farewel, my
lord—

The senate meets—there a few moments hence,
I will rejoin you.

Ofm. There, my noble lord,
We will complete this salutary work ;
Will there begin a new auspicious era,

[*Exeunt Siff. and Officer.*]

Siffredi gives his daughter to my wishes—
But does she give herself? Gay, young, and flat-
ter'd,

Perhaps engag'd, will she her youthful heart
Yield to my harsher, uncomplaining years?
I am not form'd, by flattery and praise,
By sighs and tears, and all the whining trade
Of love, to feed a fair-one's vanity;
To charm at once and spoil her. These soft arts
Nor suit my years nor temper; these be left
To boys, and doating age. A prudent, father,
By nature charg'd to guide and rule her choice,
Resigns his daughter to a husband's power,
Who with superior dignity, with reason
And manly tenderness, will ever love her;
Not first a kneeling slave, and then a tyrant.

Enter an Officer.

1 Off. " My lord, the king is rob'd, the senate
" sits,

" And waits your presence.

[*Exit Ofm.—Shouts within.*]

2 Off. " I have not seen [sport ;

" So wild a tumult ; the town is mad with tran-

" Shew us our king, they cry, our Norman king,

" The valiant Manfred's son, who lov'd the people.

" In vain I told 'em, that we had strict orders

" To keep for him himself, and for the barons,

" All these apartments clear. Naught could

" Appease their storm of zeal ; till at

" The northern gate, that fronts the sea,

" I promis'd them admittance."

1 Off. I do not marvel at their rage of joy :
He is a brave and amiable prince.

When in my Lord Siffredi's house I liv'd,
Ere by his favour I obtain'd this office,
I there remember well the young count Tancred.
To see him and to love him were the same ;
He was so noble in his ways, yet still
So affable and mild—Well, well, old Sicily,
Yet happy days await thee !

2 Off. Grant it, Heaven !
He is, they say, to wed the late king's sister,
Constantia.

1 Off. Friend, of that I greatly doubt.
Or I mistake, or lord Siffredi's daughter,
The gentle Sigismunda, has his heart.
If one may judge by kindly cordial looks,
And fond assiduous care to please each other,
Most certainly they love—Oh, be they blest,
As they deserve ! It were great pity aught
Should part a matchless pair ; the glory he,
And she the blooming grace of Sicily !

2 Off. My lord Rodolpho comes.

Enter Rodolpho from the senate.

Rod. My honest friends,
You may retire. [*Officers go out.*] A storm is in
the wind.

This will perplex us all. No, Tancred, never
Can stoop to these conditions, which at once
Attack his rights, his honours, and his love,
When he heard

Th' unjust, the base conditions of the will,
Uncertain, tost in cruel agitation,
He oft, methought, address'd himself to speak,
And interrupt Siffredi ; who appear'd,
With conscious haste, to dread that interruption,
And hurry'd on—But hark ! I hear a noise,
As if the assembly rose.

Enter Laura.

Lau. Your high-prais'd friend, the king,
Is false, most vilely false. The meanest slave
Had shewn a nobler heart.
He Manfred's son ! away ! it cannot be !
The son of that brave prince could ne'er—
He ne'er could sacrifice

All faith, all honour, gratitude and love,
All in a moment—And for what? why, truly,
For kind permission, gracious leave, to sit
On his own throne, with tyrant William's
daughter!

Rod. I stand amaz'd—You surely wrong him,
Laura—

There must be some mistake.

Lau. There can be none!

Siffredi read his full and free consent
Before th' applauding senate. True indeed,
A small remain of shame, a timorous weakness,
Even dastardly in falsehood, made him blush
To act this scene in *Sigismunda's* eye,
Who sunk beneath his perfidy and baseness.
Hence till to-morrow he adjourn'd the senate!
To-morrow fix'd with infamy to crown him!
Then leading off his gay, triumphant princess,
He left the poor, unhappy *Sigismunda*,
To bend her trembling steps to that sad home
His faithless vows will render hateful to her—
He comes—Farewel—I cannot bear his presence!

[*Exit.*]

Enter Tancred and Siffredi, meeting.

Tan. Avoid me, horrid traitor!—Go, *Rodolpho*,
Give orders that all passages this way
Be shut—Defend me from a hateful world,
The bane of peace and honour—then return—

[*Exit Rod.*]

What! dost thou haunt me still? Oh, monstrous
insult!

Unparallel'd indignity! Just heaven!
Was ever king, was ever man so treated;
So trampled into baseness?

Sif. Here, my liege,
Here strike—I nor deserve, nor ask for mercy.

Tan. All, all but this I could have borne—
but this!

This daring insolence beyond example!
This murderous stroke, that stabs my peace for
ever!

That wounds me there—there! where the hu-
man heart

Most exquisitely feels—

Sif. Oh, bear it not,

My royal lord; appease on me your vengeance!

Tan. Did ever tyrant image aught so cruel!
The lowest slave that crawls upon the earth,
Robb'd of each comfort heaven bestows on mor-
tals,

On the bare ground has still his virtue left,
The sacred treasure of an honest heart,
Which thou hast dar'd, with rash, audacious hand,
And impious fraud, in me to violate—

Sif. Behold, my lord, that rash, audacious hand,
Which not repents its crimes—Oh, glorious,
happy!

If by my ruin I can save your honour.

Tan. Such honour I renounce; with sovereign
scorn

Greatly detest it, and its mean adviser!
Hast thou not dar'd beneath my name to shelter,
Beneath thy sovereign's name, basely presum'd
To shield a lie—a lie, in public utter'd,
To all deluded Sicily? But know,
This poor contrivance is as weak as base.
What! marry her! *Constantia*! her! the daughter
Of the fell tyrant who destroy'd my father!
The very thought is madness! Ere thou seest
The torch of Hymen light these hated nuptials,
Thou shalt behold *Sicilia* wrapt in flames,
Her cities raz'd, her vallies drench'd with
slaughter—

Love set aside, my pride assumes the quarrel;
My honour now is up; in spite of thee,
A world combin'd against me, I will give
This scatter'd will in fragments to the winds,
Assert my rights, the freedom of my heart,
Crush all who dare oppose me to the dust,
And heap perdition on thee!

Sif. Sir, 'tis just.

Exhaust on me your rage; I claim it all.
But for these public threats thy passion utters,
'Tis what thou canst not do.

Tan. I cannot! ha!

What shall arrest my vengeance? Who?

Sif. Thyself,

Tan. Away! Dare not to justify thy crime!
That, that alone can aggravate its horror,
Add insolence to insolence—perhaps
May make my rage forget—

Sif.

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Siff. Oh, let it burst

On this grey head, devoted to thy service;
But when the storm has vented all its fury,
Thou thou must hear—nay more, I know thou wilt——

Wilt hear the calm, yet stronger voice of reason.
Thou must reflect that there are other duties —
Yes, thou must,
In calmer hours, divest thee of thy love,
These common passions of the vulgar breast,
This boiling heat of youth, and be a king,
The lover of thy people!

Tan. Yes, I will be a king, but not a slave;
In this will be a king; in this my people
Shall learn to judge how I will guard their rights,
When they behold me vindicate my own.
But have I, say, been treated like a king? —
Heavens! could I stoop to such outrageous usage,
I were a mean, a shameless wretch, unworthy
To wield a sceptre in a land of slaves,
A soil abhor'd of virtue; should belie
My father's blood, belie those very maxims.
At other times, you taught my youth—*Siffredi!*

[In a soften'd tone of voice.]

Siff. Behold, my prince, thy poor old servant,
Whose darling care, these twenty years, has been
To nurse thee up to virtue—behold him here,
Bent on his feeble knees, to beg, conjure thee,
With tears to beg thee to control thy passion,
And save thyself, thy honour, and thy people!
Kneeling with me, behold the many thousands
To thy protection trusted; fathers, mothers,
The sacred front of venerable age,
The tender virgin, and the helpless infant;
See them all,
Here at thy feet, conjuring thee to save them
From misery and war, from crimes and rapine—
Turn not away—Oh, is there not some part
In thy great heart, so sensible to kindness
And generous warmth, some nobler part, to feel
The prayers and tears of these, the mingled voice
Of heaven and earth?

Tan. There is, and thou hast touch'd it.
Rise, rise, *Siffredi*—O, thou hast undone me!
Unkind old man! — Oh, ill-treated *Tancred*!
Which way so'er I turn, dishonour rears

Her hideous front—and misery and ruin.
Why have you rais'd this miserable conflict
Betwixt the duties of the king and man?
Set virtue against virtue?—But hold my soul,
Thy steady purpose—Tost by various passions,
To this eternal anchor keep——There is,
Can be, no public without private virtue——
Then, mark me well, observe what I command;
To-morrow, when the senate meets again,
Unfold the whole, unravel the deceit—
Start not, my lord—This must and shall be done;
Or here our friendship ends—Howe'er disguis'd,
Whatever thy pretence, thou art a traitor.

Siff. I should indeed deserve the name of traitor,
And even a traitor's fate, had I so slightly,
From principles so weak, done what I did,
As e'er to disavow it——

Tan. Ha!

Siff. My liege,
Expect not this—Tho' practis'd long in courts,
I have not so far learn'd their subtle trade,
To veer obedient with each gust of passion.
I honour thee, I venerate thy orders,
But honour more my duty. Nought on earth
Shall ever shake me from that solid rock,
Nor smiles, nor frowns——

Tan. You will not then?

Siff. I cannot.

Tan. Away——Begone——Oh, my *Rodolpho*,
come,
And save me from this traitor——Hence, I say.
——No reply!

Away. *[Exit Siff.]*

Enter Rodolpho.

Rod. What can incense my prince so highly
Against his friend *Siffredi*!

Tan. Friend! *Rodolpho*?
When I have told thee what this friend has done,
How play'd me like a boy, a base-born wretch,
Who had nor heart nor spirit, thou wilt stand
Amaz'd, and wonder at my stupid patience.
Nothing so mean

As weak insulted power that dares not punish.
And how would that have suited with your love;
His daughter present too? Trust me, your conduct,

Howe'er

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How'er abhorrent to a heart like yours—
Tan. But this, my friend—"This black un-
 "heard-of outrage,
 "I cannot now impart"—Till Sigismunda
 Be disabus'd, my breast is tumult all;
 And by the hand of Laura, oh, let me steal
 A letter to her bosom—
 And this evening
 Secure an interview—I would not bear
 This rack another day, not for my kingdom.
 Thought drives on thought, on passions passions
 roll;
 Her smiles alone can calm my raging soul.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT III.

SCENE, a Chamber.

Sigismunda alone, sitting in a disconsolate posture.

A II, tyrant prince! ah, more than faithless
Tancred!
 Ungenerous and inhuman in thy falsehood!
 Hadst thou, this morning, when my hopeless heart,
 Submissive to my fortune and my duty,
 Had so much spirit left, as to be willing
 To give thee back thy vows, ah! hadst thou then
 Confess'd the sad necessity thy state
 Impos'd upon thee, and with gentle friendship,
 Since we must part at last, our parting soften'd;
 I should indeed—I should have been unhappy,
 But not to this extreme—
 Is there, kind heaven, no constancy in man?
 No steadfast truth, no generous fix'd affection,
 That can bear up against a selfish world?
 No, there is none—Even Tancred is inconsistent!

[*Rising.*]

Hence! let me fly this scene!—Whate'er I see,
 These roofs, these walls, each object that sur-
 rounds me,
 Are tainted with his vow—But whither fly?
 The groves are worse, the soft retreat of Belmont,
 Its deepening glooms, gay lawns, and airy sum-
 mits,
 Will wound my busy memory to torture,

And all its shades will whisper—faithless Tan-
 cred!—

My father comes—How, sunk in this disorder,
 Shall I sustain his presence?

Enter Siffredi.

Siff. Sigismunda,
 My dearest child, I grieve to find thee thus
 A prey to tears.
 Awake to reason from this dream of love,
 And shew the world thou art Siffredi's daughter.

Sig. Alas! I am unworthy of that name.

Siff. Thou art indeed to blame; thou hast too
 rashly

Engag'd thy heart, without a father's sanction.
 But this I can forgive—and, if thy heart
 Will now resume its pride, assert itself,
 And greatly rise superior to this trial,
 I to my warmest confidence again
 Will take thee, and esteem thee more my daughter.

Sig. Oh, you are gentler far than I deserve:
 It is, it ever was, my darling pride,
 To bend my soul to your supreme commands,
 Your wisest will; and tho' by love betray'd—
 Alas, and punished too—I have transgress'd
 The nicest bounds of duty, yet I feel
 A sentiment of tenderness, a source
 Of filial nature springing in my breast,
 That should it kill me, shall control this passion,
 And make me all submission and obedience
 To you, my honoured lord, the best of fathers.

Siff. Come to my arms, thou comfort of my
 age!

Thou only joy and hope of these grey hairs!
 Come, let me take thee to a parent's heart;
 There, with the kindly aid of my advice,
 Even with the dew of these paternal tears,
 Revive and nourish this becoming spirit—
 Then thou dost promise me, my Sigismunda—
 Thy father stoops to make it his request—
 Thou wilt resign thy fond presumptuous hopes,
 And henceforth never more indulge one thought
 That in the light of love regards the king?

Sig. Hopes I have none—Those by this fatal day
 Are blasted all—But from my soul to banish
 While weeping memory there retains her seat,

Thoughts

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Thoughts which the purest bosom might have cherished,

Once my delight, now even in anguish charming,
Is more, alas! my lord, than I can promise.

Sif. Absence and time, the softener of our passions,
Will conquer this. Mean time I hope from thee
A generous, great effort; that thou wilt now
Exert thy utmost force, nor languish thus
Beneath the vain extravagance of love.
Let not thy father blush to hear it said,
His daughter was so weak, e'er to admit
A thought so void of reason, that a king
Should to his rank, his honour and his glory,
The high important duties of a throne,
Even to his throne itself, madly prefer
A wild romantic passion, the fond child
Of youthful dreaming thought and vacant hours;
That he should quit his heaven-appointed station,
Desert his awful charge, the care of all.

What must, for thee,
To make thee blest, Sicilia be happy?
Rouse thee, for shame! and if a spark of virtue
Lies slumbering in thy soul, bid it blaze forth;
Nor sink unequal to the glorious lesson
This day thy lover gave thee from his throne.

Sig. Ah, that was not from virtue!—Had, my father,

That been his aim, I yield to what you say;
Why did you drag me to a fight so cruel?

Sif. It was a scene to fire thy emulation.

Sig. It was a scene of perfidy!—but know,
I will do more than imitate the king—
For he is false!—I, though sincerely pierc'd
With the best and truest passion ever touch'd
A virgin's breast, here vow to heaven, and you,
Though from my heart I cannot, from my hopes
To call this prince—What would you more, my father?

Sif. Yes, one thing more—thy father then is
This world from thee, my honour and thy own,
Demands one step; a step, by which, convinc'd,
The king may see thy heart disdains to wear
A chain which his has greatly thrown aside:
But above all, thou must root out for ever
From the king's breast the least remain of hope,
And henceforth make his mention'd love dis-
honour.

These things, my daughter, that must needs be done,

Can but this way be done—by the safe refuge,
The sacred shelter of a husband's arms.

And there is one—

Sig. Good heavens! what means my lord?

Sif. One of illustrious family, high rank,
Yet still of higher dignity and merit,
Who can and will protect thee; one to awe
The king himself—Nay, hear me, Sigismunda—
The noble Osmond courts thee for his bride,
And has my plighted word—This day—

Sig. [*Kneeling.*] My father!
Let me with trembling arms embrace thy knees!
Oh, if you ever wish to see me happy;
If e'er in infant years I gave you joy,
When, as I prattling twin'd around your neck,
You snatch'd me to your bosom; kiss'd my eyes,
And melting said you saw my mother there;
Oh, save me from that worst severity
Of fate! Oh, outrage not my breaking heart
To that degree!—I cannot!—'tis impossible!—
So soon withdraw it, give it to another—

Let me, my lord—
Or I shall die, shall, by the sudden change,
Be to distraction shock'd—Let me wear out
My hapless days in solitude and silence,
Far from the malice of a prying world;
At least—you cannot sure refuse me this—
Give me a little time—I will do all,
All I can do to please you!

Sif. My daughter! you abuse
The softness of my nature—

Sig. Here, my father,
Till you relent, here will I grow for ever!

Sif. Rise, Sigismunda—Though you touch
my heart,

Nothing can shake th' inexorable dictates
Of honour, duty and determin'd reason.

Then by the holy ties of filial love,
Resolve, I charge thee, to receive earl Osmond,
As suits the man who is thy father's choice,
And worthy of thy hand—I go to bring him—

Sig. Spare me, my dearest father!

Sif. [*Aside.*] I must rush
From her soft grasp, or nature will betray me!

2

Out

Quit me, my child!

Sig. You cannot, oh, my father!
You cannot leave me thus!

Siff. Come hither, Laura,
Come to thy friend. Now shew thyself a friend.
Combat her weakness; dissipate her tears;
Cherish, and reconcile her to her duty. [*Exit Siff.*]

Enter Laura.

Sig. Oh, woe on woe! distress'd by love and duty!

Oh, every way unhappy Sigismunda!

Lau. Forgive me, madam, if I blame your grief.
How can you waste your tears on one so false?
Unworthy of your tenderness? to whom
Nought but contempt is due and indignation?

Sig. You know not half the horrors of my fate!
I might perhaps have learn'd to scorn his fallhood;
Nay, when the first sad-burst of tears was past,
I might have rous'd my pride and scorn'd himself—
But 'tis too much, this greatest last misfortune—
Oh, whither shall I fly? Where hide me, Laura,
From the dire scene my father now prepares?

Lau. What thus alarms you, madam?

Sig. Can it be?
Can I—ah, no!—at once give to another
My violat'd heart? in one wild moment?
He brings earl Osmond to receive my vows.
Oh, dreadful change! for Tancred, haughty Osmond.

Lau. Now, on my soul, 'tis what an outrag'd heart
Like yours, should wish!—I should, by heavens, esteem it
Most exquisite revenge!

Sig. Revenge! on whom?
On my own heart, already but too wretched.

Lau. On him! this Tancred! who has basely sold,

For the dull form of despicable grandeur,
His faith, his love!—At once a slave and tyrant!

Sig. Oh, rail at me, at my believing folly,
My vain ill-founded hopes—but spare him, Laura.

Lau. Who rais'd these hopes? who triumphs
o'er that weakness?

Pardon the word—You greatly merit him;

Better than him, with all his giddy pomp;
You rais'd him by your smiles when he was nothing.

Where is your woman's pride, that guardian spirit
Giv'n us to dash the perfidy of man?
Ye powers! I cannot bear the thought with patience—

Before the public thus, before your father,
By an irrevocable solemn deed,
With such inhuman scorn, to throw you from him;
To give his faithless hand yet warm from thine,
With complicated meanness, to Constantia.
And, to complete his crime, when thy weak limbs
Could scarce support thee, then, of thee regardless,
To lead her off.

Sig. That was indeed a fight
To poison love; to turn it into rage
And keen contempt.—What means this stupid weakness

That hangs upon me? hence unworthy tears!
Disgrace my cheek no more—No more my heart,
For one so coolly false or meanly fickle—
Dare to suggest

The least excuse!—Yes, traitor, I will wring
Thy pride, will turn thy triumph to confusion—
Sicilia's daughters
Shall wond'ring see in me a great example
Of one who punish'd an ill-judging heart,
Who made it bow to what it most abhor'd!
Crush'd it to misery! for having thus
So lightly listen'd to a worthless lover!

Lau. At last it mounts, the kindling pride of virtue;

Trust me, thy marriage will embitter his—
Sig. Oh, may the furies light his nuptial torch!
Be it accurs'd as mine! for the fair peace,
The tender joys of hymeneal love,
May jealousy awak'd, and fell remorse,
Pour all their fiercest venom through his breast!
Where the fates lead, and blind revenge, I follow.—

Let me not think—By injur'd love! I vow,
Thou shalt, base prince! perfidious and inhuman!
Thou shalt behold me in another's arms!
In his thou hatest—Osmond's!

Lau. Ay, that will sting

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

His soul to madness;
Your cooler thought, besides, will of the change
Approve, and think it happy. Noble Osmond—

Sig. Talk not of Osmond, but perfidious Tan-
cred!

Rail at him, rail! invent new names of scorn!
Assist me Laura; lend my rage fresh fuel;
Support my staggering purpose, which already
Begins to fail me—Ah, my vaunts how vain—
How have I lied to my own heart—alas,
My tears return, the mighty flood o'erwhelms
me!

Lau. If thy own peace and honour cannot
keep

Thy resolution fix'd, yet, Sigismunda,
Oh, think, how deeply, how beyond retreat,
Thy father is engag'd.

Sig. Ah, wretched weakness!
That thus enthrals my soul;
And have I then no tears for thee my father?
Can I forget thy cares from helpless years,
Thy tenderness for me? Shall I for these
Repay thy stooping venerable age,
With shame, disquiet, anguish and dishonour?
It must not be—Thou first of angels, come,
Sweet filial piety, and firm my breast!
Yes, let one daughter to her fate submit,
Be nobly wretched—but her father happy!
Laura!—they come!—Oh, heavens, I cannot
stand

The horrid trial!—Open, open earth,
And hide me from their view.

Lau. Madam.

Enter Siffredi and Osmond.

Sif. My daughter,
Behold my noble friend who courts thy hand,
And whom to call my son I shall be proud.

Ofm. Think not, I presume,
Madam, on this your father's kind consent,
To make me blest. I love you from a heart,
That seeks your good superior to my own;
And will by every art of tender friendship,
Consult your dearest welfare. May I hope,
Yours does not disavow your father's choice?

Sig. I am a daughter, Sir,—and have no
power

O'er my own heart—I die—Support me, Laura.
[Faints.]

Sif. Help—bear her off—She breathes—my
daughter!

Sig. Oh,
Forgive my weakness—soft—my Laura, lead me—
To my apartment. [Exeunt *Sig.* and *Laura.*]

Sif. Pardon me, my lord,
If by this sudden accident alarm'd,
I leave you for a moment. [Exit *Sif.*]

Ofm. Let me think—
What can this mean?—Is it to me aversion?
Or is it, as I fear'd, she loves another?
Ha!—yes—perhaps the king, the young count
Tancred;

They were bred up together—Surely that,
That cannot be—Has he not given his hand,
In the most solemn manner, to Constantia?
Does not his crown depend upon the deed?
What is it then?—I care not what it be.
She must be mine—She is!—If yet her heart
Consents not to my happiness, her duty,
Join'd to my tender cares, will gain so much
Upon her generous nature—That will follow.
The man of sense, who acts a prudent part,
Not flattering steals, but forms himself the heart.
[Exit.]

ACT IV.

SCENE, a Garden.

Enter Sigismunda and Laura.

Sigismunda, with a letter in her hand.

TIS done!—I am a slave!—The fatal vow
Has pass'd my lips!—Methought in those
sad moments,

The tombs around the saints, the dark'n'd altar,
And all the trembling shrines with horror shook.
But here is still new matter of distress.

Oh, Tancred, cease to persecute me more!

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

Oh, grudge me not some calmer state of woe;
Some quiet gloom to shade my hopeless days,
Where I may never hear of love and thee—
Has Laura too conspir'd against my peace?
Why did you take this letter?—Hear it back—
I will not court new pain. *[Giving her the letter.]*

Lau. Madam, Rodolpho

Urg'd me so much, nay, even with tears con-
jur'd me,

But this once more to serve th' unhappy king—
For such he said he was—that tho' enrag'd,
Equal with thee, at his inhuman falsehood,
I could not to my brother's fervent prayers
Refuse this office—Read it—His excuses
Will only more expose his falsehood.

Sig. No:

It suits not Osmond's wife to read one line
From that contagious hand—she knows too
well!

Lau. He paints him out distress'd beyond ex-
pression,

Even on the point of madness.

He dies to see you, and to clear his faith.

Sig. Save me from that!—That would be worse
than all!

Lau. I but report my brother's words; who
then

Began to talk of some dark imposition,
That had deceiv'd us all; when interrupted,
We heard your father and earl Osmond near,
As summon'd to Constantia's court they went.

Sig. Ha! imposition?—Well, if I am doom'd
To be, o'er all my sex, the wretch of love,
In vain I would resist—Give me the letter—
To know the worst is some relief—Alas,
It was not thus, with such dire palpitations,
That Tancred, once I us'd to read thy letters.

*[Attempting to read the letter, but gives it
to Laura.]*

Ah, fond remembrance blinds me!—Read it
Laura.

Lau. *[Reads.]*

Sig. There, Laura, there, the dreadful secret
spring!

That paper! Ah, that paper! it suggests
A thousand horrid thoughts—I to my father

Gave it; and he perhaps—I dare not cast
A look that way—If yet indeed you love me,
Oh, blast me not, kind Tancred, with the truth!
Oh, pitying, keep me ignorant for ever.
What strange peculiar misery is mine?
Reduc'd to with the man I love were false?

Lau. Madam,

Behold he comes—the king—

Sig. Heavens! how escape!

No,—I will stay—This one last meeting—Leave
me. *[Exit Laura.]*

Enter Tancred.

Tan. And are these long, long hours of torture
past?

My life! my Sigismunda?

[Throwing himself at her feet.]

Sig. Rise, my lord.

To see my sovereign thus no more becomes me.

Tan. Oh let me kiss the ground on which you
tread!

Let me exhale my soul in softest transport!
Since I again behold my Sigismunda! *[Rising.]*
Unkind! How couldst thou ever deem me false!
How thus dishonour love?—After the vows,
The fervent truth, the tender protestations,
Which mine has often pour'd, to let thy breast,
Whate'er th' appearance was, admit suspicion?

Sig. How! when I heard myself your full
consent

To the late king's so just and prudent will?
Heard it before you read, in solemn senate?
When I beheld you give your royal hand
To her, whose birth and dignity of right
Demands that high alliance? Yes, my lord,
You have done well. The man whom heaven
appoints

To govern others, should himself first learn
To bend his passions to the sway of reason.
In all, you have done well; but when you bid
My humbled hopes look up to you again,
And sooth'd with wanton cruelty my weakness—
That too was well—My vanity deserv'd
The sharp rebuke.

Tan.

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

11

Tan. Chide on, chide on. Thy soft reproaches
now

Instead of wounding, only sooth my fondness.
No, no, thou charming consort of my soul!
I never lov'd thee with such faithful ardour,
As in that cruel miserable moment
You thought me false.

It was thy barbarous father, Sigismunda,
Who caught me in the toil. He turn'd that
paper,

Meant for th' assuring bond of nuptial love,
To ruin it for ever; he, he wrote
That forg'd consent, you heard, beneath my
name.

Had he not been thy father—Ha! my love,
You tremble, you grow pale!

Sig. Oh, leave me, Tancred!

Tan. No!—Leave thee?—Never! never! till
you set

My heart at peace, till these dear lips again
Pronounce thee mine! Without thee I renounce
Myself, my friends, the world—Here on this
hand——

Sig. My lord, forget that hand, which never
now

Can be to thine united——

Tan. Sigismunda!

What dost thou mean? Thy words, thy look, thy
manner,

Seem to conceal some horrid secret—Heavens!—
No—That was wild——Distraction fires the
thought!——

Sig. Inquire no more—I never can be thine.

Tan. What, who shall interpose? Who dares
attempt

To brave the fury of an injur'd king,
Who, ere he sees thee ravish'd from his hopes,
Will wrap all blazing Sicily in flames?——

Sig. In vain your power, my lord—'Tis fatal
error,

Join'd to my father's unrelenting will,
Has plac'd an everlasting bar betwixt us—
I am—earl Osmond's—wife.

Tan. Earl Osmond's wife!——

[After a long pause, during which they look at
one another with the highest agitation, and
most tender distress.

Heavens! did I hear thee right? What married?
married!

Lost to thy faithful Tancred? Lost for ever!
Couldst thou then doom me to such matchless woe,
Without so much as hearing me?—Distraction—
Alas! what hast thou done! Ah, Sigismunda!
Thy rash credulity has done a deed,
Which, of two happiest lovers that e'er felt
The blissful power, has made two finish'd
wretches!

But—Madness!—Sure thou know'st it cannot be!
This hand is mine! a thousand thousand vows—

Enter Osmond.

Os. [Snatching her hand from the king.] Ma-
dam, this hand, by the most solemn rites,
A little hour ago, was given to me,
And, did not sovereign honour now command me,
Never but with my life to quit my claim,
I would renounce it—thus!

Tan. Ha! who art thou?
Presumptuous man!

Sig. [Aside.] Where is my father? Heavens!
[Goes out.]

Os. One thou shouldst better know—Yes—
view me, one

Who can and will maintain his rights and honour
Against a faithless prince, an upstart king,
Whose first base deed is what a harden'd tyrant
Would blush to act.

Tan. Insolent Osmond! know,
This upstart king will hurl confusion on thee,
And all who shall invade his sacred rights,
Prior to thine—Thine, founded on compulsion,
On infamous deceit—I will annul,
By the high power with which the laws invest me,
Those guilty forms in which you have entrap'd
My queen betroth'd, who has my heart, my hand,
And shall partake my throne—If, haughty lord,
If this thou didst not know, then know it now;
And know, besides, as I have told thee this,
Shouldst thou but think to urge thy treason fur-
ther——

Thy life shall answer for it.

Os. Ha! my life!——

It moves my scorn to hear thy empty threats,
When was it that a Norman baron's life
Became so vile, as on the frown of kings
To hang?—Of that, my lord, the law must
Judge;

Or if the law be weak, my guardian sword—

Tan. Dare not to touch it, traitor, lest my rage
Break loose, and do a deed that misbecomes me.

Enter Siffredi.

Siff. My gracious lord, what is it I behold!
My sovereign in contention with his subjects?
Surely this house deserves from royal Tancred
A little more regard, than to be made
A scene of trouble, and unseemly jars.
Heavens! can your highness
From your exalted character descend,
Unkindly thus disturb the sweet repose,
The secret peace of families, for which
Alone the free-born race of man to laws
And government submitted?

Tan. My lord Siffredi,
Spare thy rebuke. The duties of my station
Are not to me unknown. But thou, old man,
Dost thou not blush to talk of rights invaded?
And of our best, our dearest bliss disturb'd?
Thou, who with more than barbarous perfidy
Hast trampled on allegiance, justice, truth,
Humanity itself, beneath thy feet?
Thou know'st thou hast—I could, to thy confusion,
Return thy hard reproaches; but I spare thee
Before this lord, for whose ill-sorted friendship
Thou hast most basely sacrific'd thy daughter.
Farewel, my lord.—For thee, lord constable,
Who dost presume to lift thy surly eye
To my soft love, my gentle Sigismunda,
I once again command thee, on thy life—
Yes—chew thy rage—but mark me—on thy life,
No farther urge thy arrogant pretensions!

[Exit Tan.]

Ofm. Ha! Arrogant pretensions! Heaven, and
earth!

What! arrogant pretensions to my wife?
My wedded wife! Where are we! In a land
Of civil rule, of liberty and law?—

Not, on my life, pursue them?—Giddy prince!
My life disdains thy nod. It is the gift
Of parent Heaven, who gave me too an arm,
A spirit to defend it against tyrants.
Mine is a common cause. My arm shall guard,
Mix'd with my own, the rights of each Sicilian.
Ere to thy tyrant rage they fall a prey,
I shall find means to shake thy tottering throne,
And crush thee in the ruins!—
Constantia is thy queen!

Siff. Lord constable,
Let us be steadfast in the right: but let us
Act with cool prudence, and with manly temper,
As well as manly firmness.
Remember that my house
Protects my daughter still; and ere I see her
Thus ravish'd from us, by the arm of power,
This hand should act the Roman father's part.
Fear not; be temperate; all will yet be well.
I know the king.—Trust me, to reason
He will return.

Ofm. He will!—By heavens, he shall!—
You know the king—I wish, my lord Siffredi,
That you had deign'd to tell me all you knew—
And would you have me wait, with dutious pa-
tience,
Till he return to reason? Ye just powers!
When he has planted on our necks his foot,
And trod us into slaves; when his vain pride
Is cloy'd with our submission.
No, no, my lord, there is a nobler way,
To teach the blind, oppressive Fury reason:
Oft has the lustre of avenging steel
Unseal'd her stupid eyes—The sword is reason!

Enter Rodolpho with Guards.

Rod. My lord high constable of Sicily,
In the king's name, and by his special order,
I here arrest you prisoner of the state.

Ofm. What king? I know no king of Sicily,
Unless he be the husband of Constantia.

Rod. Then know him now—Behold his royal
orders
To bear you to the castle of Palermo.

Siff. Let the big torrent foam its madness off
Submit,

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Submit, my lord—No castle long can hold
Our wrongs—This, more than friendship or alli-
ance,
Confirms me thine; this binds me to thy for-
tunes,

By the strong tie of common injury,
Which nothing can dissolve—I grieve, Rodolpho,
To see the reign in such unhappy fort
Begin.

Ofm. The reign! the usurpation call it!
This meteor king may blaze a while, but soon
Must spend his idle terrors—Sir, lead on—
Farewel, my lord—More than my life and fortune,
Remember well, is in your hands—my honour!

Siff. Our honour is the same. My son, fare-
wel——

We shall not long be parted. On these eyes
Sleep shall not shed his balm, till I behold thee
Restor'd to freedom, or partake thy bonds.

Even noble courage is not void of blame,
Till nobler patience sanctifies its flame.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT V.

SCENE, a Chamber.

Siffredi, alone.

THE prospect lours around. I found the king,
Tho' calm'd a little, with subsiding tempest,
As suits his generous nature, yet in love
Abated nought, most ardent in his purpose!
Inexorably fix'd, whate'er the risque,
To claim my daughter and dissolve this marriage—
I have embark'd, upon a perilous sea,
A mighty treasure.
Bear witness Heaven! Thou mind-inspecting eye!
My breast is pure. I have preferr'd my duty,
The good and safety of my fellow subjects,
To all those views that fire the selfish race
Of mortal men, and mix them in eternal broils.

Enter an Officer belonging to Siffredi.

Of. My lord, a man of noble port, his face
Wrapt in disguise, is earnest for admission.

Sig. Go, bid him enter—— [*Officer goes out.*]
Ha! wrapp'd in disguise!
And at this late, unseasonable hour!
Who can it be!

Enter Osmond, discovering himself.

Siff. Earl Osmond, you?—Welcome, once
more,

To this glad roof!—But why in this disguise?
Would I could hope the king exceeds his pro-
mise!

I have his faith, soon as to-morrow's sun
Shall gild Sicilia's cliffs, you shall be free.——
Has some good angel turn'd his heart to justice?

Ofm. It is not by the favour of count Tancred
That I am here. As much I scorn his favour,
As I defy his tyranny and threats——

Our friend Godfredo, who commands the castle,
On my parole, ere dawn, to render back
My person, has permitted me this freedom.
Know then; the faithless outrage of to-day,
By him committed whom you call the king,
Has rous'd Constantia's court. Our friends, the
friends

Of virtue, justice, and of public faith,
Ripe for revolt, are in high ferment all.
I thence of you, as guardian of the laws,
As guardian of this will, to you entrusted,
Desire, nay more, demand your instant aid,
To see it put in vigorous execution.

Siff. You cannot doubt, my lord, of my con-
currence.

Who, more than I, have labour'd this great point?
'Tis my own plan; and if I drop it now,
I should be justly branded with the shame
Of rash advice, or despicable weakness.
But let us not precipitate the matter.
Constantia's friends are numerous and strong;
Yet Tancred's, trust me, are of equal force.
E'er since the secret of his birth was known,
The people all are in a tumult hurl'd
Of boundless joy—Oh, if our prating virtue
Dwells not in words alone—Oh, let us join,
My generous Osmond, to avert these woes,
And yet sustain our tottering Norman kingdom!

Ofm.

Os. But how, Siffredi, how?—If by soft means

We can maintain our rights, and save our country,
May his unnatural blood first stain the sword,
Who, with un pitying fury, first shall draw it!

Siff. I have a thought, the glorious work be thine.

Suppose my daughter, to her God devoted,
Were plac'd within some convent's sacred verge,
Beneath the dread protection of the altar—

Os. Ere then, by heavens! I would
Turn whining monk myself,
And pray incessant for the tyrant's safety.—
What! How! because an insolent invader,
A sacrilegious tyrant.

*What! shall I tamely yield her up,
Even in the manner you propose?—Oh, then
I were supremely vile! degraded! sham'd!
The scorn of manhood! and abhor'd of honour!*

Siff. There is, my lord, an honour, the calm child

Of reason, of humanity, and mercy,
Superior far to this punctilious demon,
That singly minds itself, and oft embroils
With proud barbarian niceties the world.

Os. My lord, my lord, I cannot brook your
prudence;

It holds a pulse unequal to my blood—
Unblemish'd honour is the flower of virtue!
The vivifying soul! And he who slights it,
Will leave the other dull and lifeless dross.

Siff. No more—You are too warm.

Os. You are too cool.

Siff. Too cool, my lord? I were indeed too cool,
Not to resent this language, and to tell thee—
I wish earl Osmond were as cool as I

To his own selfish bliss—ay, and as warm
To that of others—But of this no more—
My daughter is thy wife—I gave her to thee,
And will, against all force, maintain her thine.
But think not I will catch thy headlong passions,
Whirl'd in a blaze of madness o'er the land;
Or, till the last extremity compels me,
Risk the dire means of war—The king, to-morrow,

Will set you free; and, if by gentle means

Ho does not yield my daughter to your arms,
And wed Constantia, as the will requires,
Why then expect me on the side of justice—
Let that suffice.

Os. It does—Forgive my heat.
My rankled mind, by injuries inflam'd,
May be too prompt to take and give offence.

Siff. 'Tis past—Your wrongs, I own, may well
transport

The wisest mind—But henceforth, noble Osmond,

Do me more justice, honour more my truth,
Nor mark me with an eye of squint suspicion—
Return, my son, and from your friend Goffredo
Release your word. There try, by soft repose,
To calm your breast.

Os. Bid the vext ocean sleep,
Swept by the pinions of the raging north—
But your frail age, by care and toil exhausted,
Demands the balm of all-repairing rest.

Siff. Soon as to-morrow's dawn shall streak the
skies,

I, with my friends in solemn state assembled,
Will to the palace and demand your freedom,
Then by calm reason, or by higher means,
The king shall quit his claim, and in the face
Of Sicily, my daughter shall be yours.

Farewel.

Os. My lord, good night. [Exit Siffredi.]

[After a long pause.] I like him not—

Yes—I have mighty matter of suspicion.

My honour is not safe, while here my wife
Remains—Who knows but he this very night
May bear her to some convent, as he mention'd—
The king too—tho' I smother'd up my rage,
I mark'd it well,—will set me free to-morrow.
Why not to-night? He has some dark design—
By Heavens, he has!—I am abus'd most grossly;
Made the vile tool of this old statesman's schemes.
I will convince him that earl Osmond never
Was form'd to be his dupe—I will bear her off
This night, and lodge her in a place of safety,
I have a trusty band that waits not far.
Hence! let me lose no time—One rapid moment
Should ardent form, at once, and execute
A bold design—'Tis fix'd—

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The mine is laid,
And only wants my kindling touch to spring.

[Exit.

SCENE, Sigismunda's Apartments.

Enter Sigismunda and Laura.

Lau. Heavens, 'tis a fearful night!

Sig. Ah! the black rage

Of midnight tempest, or th' assuring smiles
Of radiant morn, are equal all to me.

Nought now has charms or terrors to my breast.

The feat of stupid woe!—Leave me, my Laura.

Kind rest, perhaps, may hush my woes a little—

Oh, for that quiet sleep that knows no morning!

Lau. Madam, indeed I know not how to go.

Indulge my fondness—Let me watch awhile

By your sad bed, till these dread hours shall pass.

Sig. Alas! what is the toil of elements, [Thunder.

This idle perturbation of the sky,

To what I feel within?—Oh, that the fires

Of pitying Heaven would point their fury here!—

Good night, my dearest Laura.

Lau. Oh, I know not

What this oppression means—But 'tis with pain,

With tears I can persuade myself to leave you—

Well then—Good night, my dearest Sigismunda.

[Exit.

Sig. And am I then alone?—The most undone,

Most wretched being now beneath the cope

Of this affrighting gloom that wraps the world—

I said I did not fear—Ah, me! I feel

A shivering horror run thro' all my powers!

Oh, I am nought but tumult, fears and weakness!

And yet how idle fear when hope is gone,

Gone, gone for ever!—Oh, thou gentle scene

[Looking towards her bed.

Of sweet repose, where by th' oblivious draught

Of each sad toilsome day, to peace restor'd,

Unhappy mortals lose their woes awhile,

Thou hast no peace for me!—What shall I do?

How pass this dreadful night, so big with terror?

Here, with the midnight shades, here will I sit,

[Sitting down.

A prey to dire despair, and ceaseless weep

The hours away—Bless me—I heard a noise—

[Starting up.

No—I mistook—Nothing but silence reigns,

And awful midnight round—Again!—Oh,

Heavens!

My lord the king!

Enter Tancred.

Tan. Be not alarm'd, my love.

Sig. My royal lord, why at this midnight hour!
How came you hither?

Tan. By that secret way

My love contriv'd, when we, in happier days,

Us'd to devote these hours, so much in vain,

To vows of love and everlasting friendship.

Sig. Why will you thus persist to add new stings

To her distress, who never can be thine?

Oh, fly me! fly! you know——

Tan. I know too much.

Oh, how I could reproach thee, Sigismunda!

Pour out my injur'd soul in just complaints!

But now the time permits not, these swift mo-
ments——

I told thee how thy father's artifice

Forc'd me to seem perfidious in thy eyes.

E'er since—a dreadful interval of care,

My thoughts have been employ'd, not without
hope,

How to defeat Siffredi's barbarous purpose.

But thy credulity has ruin'd all,

Thy rash, thy wild—I know not what to name it—

Oh, it has prov'd the giddy hopes of man

To be delusion all, and sickening folly!

Sig. Ah, generous Tancred! ah, thy truth de-
stroy me!

Yes, yes, 'tis I, 'tis I alone am false!

My hasty rage, join'd to my tame submission,

More than the most exalted filial duty

Could e'er demand, has dash'd our cup of fate

With bitterness unequal'd—But, alas,

What are thy woes to mine?—to mine! just
Heaven!

Now is thy turn of vengeance—hate, renounce
me!

Oh, leave me to the fate I well deserve,

To sink in hopeless misery!—at least,

Try to forget thy worthless Sigismunda.

Tan.

Tan. Forget thee! No—Thou art my soul
itself!

I have no thought, no hope, no wish but thee—
Ah, how forget thee!—Much must be forgot,
Ere Tancred can forget his Sigismunda.

Sig. But you, my lord, must make that great
effort.

Tan. Can Sigismunda make it?

Sig. Ah, I know not

With what success—But all that feeble woman
And love-entangled reason can perform,
I, to the utmost, will exert to do it.

Tan. Oh, barbarous Sigismunda—
And canst thou talk thus steadily? thus treat me
With such un pitying, unrelenting rigour?

Poor is the love, that rather than give up
A little pride, a little formal pride,

The breath of vanity, can bear to see

The man, whose heart was once so dear to thine,
By many a tender vow so mix'd together,
A prey to anguish, fury and distraction!

Thou canst not, surely, make me such a wretch!
Thou canst not, Sigismunda—Yet relent.

Oh, save us yet—Rodolpho, with my guards,
Waits in the garden—Let us seize the moments
We ne'er may have again—With more than power
I will assert thee mine, with fairest honour.

The world shall even approve; each honest bosom
Swell'd with a kindred joy to see us happy.

Sig. The world approve!—What is the world
to me?

The conscious mind is its own awful world.—

“And mine is fix'd—Distress me then no more;

“Not all the heart can plead, (and it, alas,
“Pleads but too much).”

Shall ever shake th' unalterable distates

That tyrannize my breast.

Tan. 'Tis well—No more—

I yield me to my fate—Yes, yes inhuman!

Since thy barbarian heart is steel'd by pride,

Shut up to love and pity, here behold me

Cast on the ground, a vile and abject wretch,

Lost to all cares, all dignities, all duties;

Here will I grow, breathe out my faithful soul;

Here at thy feet—Death alone shall part us.

Sig. Have you then vow'd to drive me to per-
dition?

What can I more?—Yes, Tancred, once again

I will forget the dignity my station

Commands me to sustain—for the last time

Will tell thee, that I fear no ties, no duty,

Can ever root thee from my hapless bosom.

Oh, leave me—fly me—were it but in pity—

To see what once we tenderly have lov'd,

Cut off from every hope—cut off for ever—

Is pain thy generosity should spare me.

Then rise, my lord; and if you truly love me;

If you respect my honour, nay, my peace,

Retire—for though th' emotions of my heart

'An ne'er alarm my virtue; yet, alas,

They tear it so, they pierce it with such anguish—

Oh, 'tis too much—I cannot bear the conflict.

Enter Osmond.

Osmon. Turn, tyrant, turn, and answer to my ho-
nour,

For this thy base insufferable outrage!

Tan. Insolent traitor! think not to escape

Thyself my vengeance. [*They fight. Osmond falls.*]

Sig. Help, here! Help!—Oh, heavens!

[*Throwing herself down by him.*]

Alas, my lord, what meant your headlong rage?

That faith, which I this day, upon the altar,

To you devoted, is unblemish'd, pure

As vestal truth; was resolutely yours,

Beyond the power of aught on earth to shake it.

Osmon. Perfidious woman! die!—

[*Shortening his sword, he plunges into her breast.*]

And to the grave

Attend a husband, yet but half aveng'd!

Tan. Oh, horror—horror—execrable villain—

Osmon. And, tyrant! thou!—Thou shalt not o'er
my tomb

Exult—'Tis well—'Tis great—I die content—

[*Dies.*]

Enter Rodolpho and Laura.

Tan. [*Throwing himself down by Sigismunda.*]

Quick—here—bring aid—

Ah, that gentle bosom

Pours fast the streams of life.

Sig.

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Sig. All aid is vain,
I feel the powerful hand of death upon me—
But oh, it sheds a sweetness through my fate,
That I am thine again; and without blame
May in my Tancred's arms resign my soul!

Tan. Oh, death is in that voice! so gently mild,
So sadly sweet, as mixes even with mine
The tears of hovering angels!—Mine again!—
And is it thus the cruel fates have joined us?
Are these the horrid nuptials they prepare
For love like ours?—Yes, death shall soon unite us.

Sig. Live, live, my Tancred!—Let my death
 suffice
To expiate all that may have been amiss.
May it appease the fates, avert their fury
From thy propitious reign!

Enter Siffredi fix'd in astonishment and grief.

My father!—Oh, how shall I lift my eyes
To thee, my sinking father!

Siff. Awful heaven!

I am chastis'd—My dearest child!—

Sig. Where am I?

A fearful darkness closes all around—
My friends! We needs must part—I must obey
Th' impetuous call—Farewel, my Laura!
Oh, my dear father, bow'd beneath the weight
Of age and grief—the victim even of virtue,
Receive my last adieu—Where art thou, Tancred?
Give me thy hand—But, ah,—it cannot save me
From the dire king of terrors, whose cold power
Creeps o'er my heart—Oh!

Tan. How these pangs distract me—
Oh, lift thy gracious eyes—Thou leav'st me then—
Thou leav'st me, Sigismunda!

Sig. Oh—I die—
Eternal mercy take my trembling soul—
Oh, 'tis the only thing of death to part
From those we love—from thee—farewel, my
 Tancred. [Dies.]

Tan. Thus, then—

[Flying to his sword, is held by Rodolpho.]

Rod. Hold, hold, my lord—Have you forgot
Your Sigismunda's last request already?

Tan. Off—set me free—Think not to bind me
 down,

With barbarous friendship, to the rack of life—
What hand can shut the thousand, thousand gates,
Which death still opens to the woes of mortals?—
Off, traitors, off, or my distracted soul
Will burst indignant from this jail of nature,
To where she beckons yonder—No, mild seraph;
Point not to life—I cannot linger here,
Cut off from thee, the miserable pity,
The scorn of human kind—A trampled king!
Oh, shame—Oh, agony—Oh, the fell stings
Of late, of vain repentance—Ha, my brain
Is all on fire—a wild abyss of thought—
Th' infernal world discloses!—See! behold him!
Lo, with fierce smiles he shakes the bloody steel,
And mocks my feeble tears—Hence, quickly hence!
Spurn his vile carcass—give it to the dogs—
Expose it to the winds and screaming ravens.
Ah, impotence of rage.

Rod. "Preserve him, heaven."

Tan. What am I? Where?

Sad, silent, all?—The forms of dumb despair,
Around some mournful tomb.—What do I see?
This soft abode of innocence and love
Turn'd to the house of death, a place of horror—
Ah, that poor corpse—pale—pale—deform'd with
 murder!
Is that my Sigismunda?

[Throws himself down by her.]

Siff. *[After a pathetic pause, looking on the scene
 before him.]* Have I liv'd

To these enfeebled years, by heaven reserv'd,
To be a dreadful monument of justice?—
Rodolpho, raise the king, and bear him hence
From this distracting scene of blood and death.
Taught hence, ye parents, who from nature stray,
And the great ties of social life betray;
Ne'er with your children act a tyrant's part;
'Tis yours to guide, not violate the heart.
Ye vainly wise, who o'er mankind preside,
Behold my righteous woes, and drop your pride;
Keep virtue's simple path before your eyes,
Nor think from evil, good can ever rise.

[Exit Siffredi.]

THE END.

